Q: Shall we start by talking about your family background? I am interested in such things as where and when you were born, where you grew up, the influence of being in a military family, and particularly the people and events that influenced you and your later career.

A: Well, that's a broad subject. My father was from Tennessee, and he came from a fairly large family.[1] They didn't have any money. The Civil War hadn't been over too long, and he found he could get an education by going to West Point. So that's why he went, solely for that. His first station in 1902 was Vancouver Barracks in Washington.

Q: Did he go into the Engineers?

A: No he was in artillery. In those days there was just artillery. At Vancouver he met a young lady, but she wasn't even old enough to think about getting married at the moment. But he stayed on it for a couple of years until she was old enough to think about getting married, and they married in 1904 when it was time for him to change station. They went first to Fort Warren in Wyoming and then to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, where old Geronimo was a prisoner.[2] My mother entertained her grandchildren with tales of Chief Geronimo and Fort Sill. If there was ever a time when you needed to quiet them down, all she had to do was sit down in a chair and start talking about Geronimo. Boy, she had them all enthralled, our kids and later the great-grandchildren also. Their third station was Fort Barrancas in Pensacola, and that's where I was born.

Q: How do you spell that?

A: B-A-R-R-A-N-C-A-S. And you just evidenced one of the problems of my early life. You know, going to school you had to write down the place you were born. I could never remember how to spell Barrancas. Today you could say Pensacola because Fort Barrancas has been engulfed by the Naval Air Station; but Barrancas, I didn't know. I left

there at the age of two, so you can imagine how much I remember.

But anyhow, I was born on the 26th of August 1906, and one month later went through my first hurricane, which was a doozer. Quite a few men were lost at Fort Barrancas and its satellite, Fort Pickens across the sound, during the hurricane. Bienville Square in downtown Mobile had some ships end up in it, so it was a pretty good little hurricane.

My father went from there to Fort Monroe. I vaguely remember living in the old fortress there. Then we went to Washington-I was about four I guess--and stayed there a couple of years. By this time he had chosen Coast Artillery when they split the two artilleries. He was in the Office of the Chief of Coast Artillery, and they decided they wanted him to write a training manual. But the old "Manchu law"[3] would only permit you to stay so long in Washington at a time, so they made him the commanding officer of Fort Hunt, Virginia. Coming from Washington it is just short of Mount Vernon, right across the river from old Fort Washington. Fort Hunt was a one-battery post, a very modern one, with disappearing rifles. To me it's always amazing that I was living there in a place where we were defending the capital of the United States from enemy navies. They were going to shoot down the Potomac River and stop the invaders! It is amazing. And that's in my lifetime. I can remember Fort Hunt. Now it's a park under the National Park Service.

It became time for me to go to school while I was at Fort Hunt, and there wasn't any school. It was a little one-battery post with about five officers, counting the doctor. So I started school in post headquarters. The post bugler had the job of teaching me and a sergeant's son named Percy Hunt. The sergeant owned a farm adjacent to Fort Hunt, and his son and I were the only young ones around. And so the bugler taught us, concentrating on arithmetic, and my mother supplemented my schooling and taught me a little bit of English--spelling and grammar and writing. My brother Jack was born there in 1913, and then we went back to Washington.[4] My father returned to the Chief of

Coast Artillery's office and continued to work there, and for the next eight years we continued to live all over northwest Washington.

I started formal schooling in Cook School in Washington in the third grade, so I was probably a little more than eight because I had to make up a grade later to get up to par. In 1916 we moved to Park Road and 16th Street to a tremendous big home that is now a fraternity house, I believe. My mother was distantly related to Congressman LaFollette from around Pullman, Washington, and he was related to Senator Bob LaFollette from Wisconsin, and we all lived together in this one house.5 I'm not quite sure what the arrangements were, but I believe there was a certain amount of credit given to my folks for running the place. My mother managed the servants and the kitchen and so on. That's probably how we could afford to live there. I don't know. But it was about a three-story house, and Senator LaFollette and Congressman LaFollette's kids, all of them, were very talented. One of the congressman's sons was a sculptor and painter and a violinist. He's now living just outside New York and he's continuing to teach violin.

But anyhow, we lived there two or three years. You say, "What's influenced me?" I don't know how much it influenced me, but at the table at night there were always 12, 14, or 15 people, and I was permitted to sit there if I kept my trap properly closed. We had a serving congressman and we had a serving senator. And this was right before World War I. And we had my father, who was involved on the military side, and they got some pretty hot arguments going. I'm pretty sure my father didn't agree with a lot of things Senator LaFollette was pushing for, but he admired his mind and his sincerity. It couldn't help but soak into me some.

Q: Do you remember LaFollette personally?

A: Oh, yes. And I remember another thing. My brother was going on two or three years old then. He was born in '13, so Chester LaFollette, the congressman's son I was talking about, was trying to make a head--I've got it upstairs in front of the mantel--a bas-relief head of my brother. He

got him to **pose by** putting up a stepladder, about a ten-step stepladder, and the little boy would climb **up** and down those steps, and Chester would be standing on his head and measuring. I didn't watch much, but you just couldn't miss it. It was a big studio on the top floor, and Jack and I played there frequently.

And then we **moved** from there to an apartment on Kalorama Road between Columbia Road and 18th Street. On Kalorama Road in those days, and all around us there, lived cabinet officers and other high-ranking people. I wasn't smart enough to get very impressed by it, but I have a friend named Keller, Chuck Keller,[6] whose father was an Engineer officer, and was at the time the Engineer Commissioner of the District [of Columbia], and he remembers those celebrities who lived around us. Oh, **we** had a couple of the earliest motion picture child stars who lived around **somewhere near us,** and when you'd catch a streetcar you'd rub shoulders with those people. Anyhow it was interesting. We moved from there to another house **on Wyoming and** Connecticut, where from there I went to high school. **I was** supposed to go to Central, but I thought Western was much better, so I got special authority to go to Western. I rode a bicycle over to Western High School from Wyoming and Connecticut. I went into the high school cadets, and **sometimes** for formation of one kind or another I had to ride that bicycle with a rifle slung over my back. And it was a big old Craig Jorgensen rifle, a Spanish War type. It was as big as I was and kind of heavy.

In those days--talking about school problems--we had two shifts. I **had** to go to the afternoon shift as a freshman. I was there for two years in high school and my company won the high school competitive drill. This was one of the few times Western had ever done it. It was a great honor. And when President Harding was inaugurated, our company, as a reward for having won the **competitive** drill, was stationed right across the street from the White House as part of the honor guard. We didn‘t move, we just stood there carrying these heavy rifles. Then later we were taken in to shake hands with Harding in his office area. All this made a big impression on us.

Then in the summer of **1922** my father was ordered to Fort Rosecrans in San Diego as the commanding officer, and we went out there.[7] By this time I was 16 and my brother then was **about 9.** I remember Fort Rosecrans was on a big cliff, a high bluff, with the beautiful clear blue water of San Diego Bay. We'd been used to going swimming up around New York harbor and the Jersey **beaches, so nothing would** do but we put on our bathing suits and ran down and dove off the pier. It was almost like the movies where they come right back out again. It was cold! We didn't realize how cold it was going to be.

But we had only been there about two or three months when the decision was made to close Fort Rosecrans, and my father was ordered to Hawaii. So we went to Hawaii, where he was the commanding officer of Fort Ruger, and I went to high school as a junior.[8] I'm sure it must have been a heavy load on my family because it was a private school, Panahou, which was one of the oldest schools west of the Rocky Mountains. It was founded in 1841, and it's a very high-class school. They paid my way to the high school and my **brother's way to the** grammar school, and I wrangled them into letting me buy a car to get us to school. I was allowed to do that provided I would carry my brother. So I had a thing we called a fireless **cooker.** It leaked, so I used to go to the shops and borrow tools and get guidance, and I took an old FWD [four-wheel **drive]** radiator, a big old thing, and cut it down to fit the shell of the Dodge. It was fine except it still leaked, so the procedure was always to fill the radiator up just before going to school and fill it just before starting home. And the other thing, to be sure it would start, you always left it on a hill. But it worked fine. I went there for two years and graduated in **1924.** I told my father that I would like very much to go to West Point, and he said, "Well, we have got to get the appointment. Probably you'll have to take the presidential because we aren't going to be able to get a congressional appointment. Of course, that's pretty tough because there aren't very many."

Q: Why couldn't you get a congressional appointment?

A Well, we hadn't had any contact, except the congressman we had lived with, and he had been defeated by that time. I had a promise of an appointment from another who was related to somebody in my father's family, but when the time came he said for political reasons he couldn't afford to do it. That's fine. But anyhow our tour would be up in another year and my father promised to send me to an expensive school, a preparatory school in Washington I don't know, but it probably cost $1,500 a year or something like that. In those days that was a lot. And so he said in the meantime I ought to go to the University of Hawaii and get a start. So I went and I liked it. As a matter of fact, I was a reasonably proficient tennis player. I'll show you the tennis cups I have. I haven't any golf prizes but a lot of tennis cups. But anyhow, I really wasn't very good, but I'd learned to keep getting the ball back. I entered the University of Hawaii handicap tournament and, since I was an unknown, they gave me a handicap of two. That meant I had 30 when the game started. I did right well against the first man I played, and the next one I played was the champion of the university. He was assessed a minus 30, which meant if I could just hang on and win two out of the first six points, I'd win the game. So I beat him about six-love, and there was great furor about the weakness of the handicap system! But I had put him out of the tournament, and I was riding high.

That weekend I heard a rumor that there was an Army prep school for West Point out at Schofield Barracks for enlisted men,9 and I thought, gee, you know, that might save my father a little money -and might even get me there a year sooner. so I asked him, "What about that? Could you get me in that school?" He said, "I don't know. I might be able to. But now think about it, I've promised to send you to a prep school in Washington next year, and it's not hurting you a bit to get this work at the university and get a little broader background." But he said, "It's up to you." And I said, "What would you advise me?" He said, "I'm not going to advise you. You ask any questions you want. I'll tell you the answers as I see them. But you've got to make up your own mind." And I spent a miserable weekend. I'd asked a lot of

questions, and I was trying to make up my mind. Finally, come Monday morning, I said, "Okay, I want to try it." So sure enough, he got me permission to attend the West Point Preparatory School for the Hawaiian Department at Schofield Barracks.

The Hawaiian Department was authorized14 vacancies for enlisted men to be appointed to the military academy as their quota, if they had 14 who could pass. Theoretically, there was competition, but in **fact if they** could just pass, they would get in. I found there was one other presidential, a boy whose father was stationed at Schofield Barracks, who was already going to the school, but he was living at home and going to school in civilian clothes. And then there was one National Guardsman who was attending. So **I** put on my ROTC uniform and lived in the **3d** Engineers' quadrangle in the barracks of Company G of the First Gas Regiment. I think it **cost my** father the munificent **sum of about $11.90 a month** for my ration. It was the total cost of going to school other than going back and forth to Fort Ruger on weekends.

I lived in the barracks along with the rest of the **50 or 60 men. The school had been going for** two **months when I joined them, and it wasn't too easy to catch up. By that time I had found out that there were probably about five presidential appointments available for the whole United States that year, and here was one guy right there in the same school with me, and it looked like he was** going to beat me out. So things didn't look too bright. But I decided I had to work. We had two squad **rooms, one for study and one for sleeping. Many of these enlisted personnel had** not finished high school. They were working pretty hard, working until one, two, or three in the **morning, and I was staying with them. But I found myself falling asleep in class, and since we had** three brand new second lieutenants, recent graduates of the military academy, assigned as our instructors, I came to the conclusion that if the Army was going to furnish these people and use up their whole time, it behooved me to listen to what they had to say. So I decided I was just going to go to sleep at a certain time every night and not fall asleep **in class. well, as a result, about 11 o'clock,** I **went back to the squad room and crawled into bed**

and went to sleep. And about two or three in the morning, when the other ones would come drifting in to go to bed, they'd look over and say, "Look at that damn weary Wilson over there sound asleep and here I am working." As a result I became known as "Weary" Wilson, and I've carried that ever since then.

Q: I was going to ask you about the origin of your nickname.

A: Well, that's how it started. And I might say that I found it had some advantages. There are lots of Wilsons in the world--there were 14 Cadet Wilsons when I entered the military academy and two W. Wilsons in the plebes of my company. Also, when a commanding officer gets word that a Wilson has been assigned to him and finds he's known as "Weary" Wilson, he expects the worst. So anything I could accomplish made a great impression!

Q: To get back to Schofield Barracks--

A: The school was very good. They worked hard on you, and every Saturday we went through a portion of a prior-year West Point entrance exam. Some Saturday mornings we'd do the English portion, the next Saturday morning we'd do part of the math portion, the next one part of the history, and so on. And just every Saturday morning you went through the routine of getting there and starting when the bell rang and you started work. When the time was up, the bell rang and you stopped work, and it was just kind of ground into you. And, as I say, I got impressed with the fact that my chances were pretty dim. In English, I thought well, there's one thing I can do something about. I had a good high school teacher in English at Punahou. So I went back to her and asked her if I could write themes every week and bring them to her on the weekend and get her to correct them, and then I'd copy them over and then do it again and again. The net effect was that I had about six themes memorized, punctuation and everything. And out of those six I got to use about three of them. I'd guessed well enough so that most everything I turned in in English was along the lines of what I pretty well had suspected.

Of course, I memorized history, my gosh it was coming out my ears! As I understand it--I don't know this for a fact--I ended up that year as number one in the five presidentials that got appointed, in spite of the fact that this kid that was right there had been beating me all year.10 And as a matter of fact, he turned out to be the number one boy in my class when we graduated from the military academy, too. I've never tried to confirm it or anything, but I do know that there were only five, and I was one of them.

Q: Five in the entire United States?

A; Yes .

Q; So actually there were two presidentials from the same school?

A: Two from the same little group. The only two trying for presidentials in that school both made it. There **were only** three others in the rest of the country. I didn't know how impressive that was then, but I do now. But also the National Guardsman made it and 14 enlisted men; their total allotment passed and entered the military academy the first of July. Some of them dropped out pretty soon, different things happened, but quite a few of them made it all the way through. As a matter of fact, the company commander of my company, A Company, our first-class year; was a first sergeant at the time of the school. He was a young man, they didn't have them in those days that young, but he had made it. He hadn't finished high school, but he was an outstanding member of my class. The **poor guy got** killed in a flying training accident very shortly after graduation.

I used to drive home every Saturday afternoon after we completed this prior[-year] West Point exam, go to Fort Ruger, fall asleep at home, and eat. Eat mainly. And I did sneak over to the officers' club **at** Schofield Barracks **once** in a while during the week and eat. Then I'd go write the theme on Sunday and take it by and see my former teacher. Then Sunday night or early Monday morning at the crack of dawn, I'd drive back to Schofield Barracks. It was about a four-hour drive in those days. After we completed the entrance exams and

the regular preparatory part was over, those of us who the instructors thought had probably made it were permitted to stay and take advanced work to be sure we had a good start when we got to West Point. We didn't know whether I had made it or not when we left Hawaii. We were going back by way of my grandparents' place out in Vancouver, Washington, and I got word there to report to the military academy.

So I got on a train out in Portland, and on that same train was this National Guard guy that had been in Schofield Barracks. Another man on the train was a grown man as far as I was concerned. I called him "sir." The last night on the train, as we were going down the Hudson River and I was getting ready to crawl in my berth, this guy sat across from me and said, "Well, I've listened to you all talk about West Point. I'm going there, too." I was amazed. I thought he was past the age limit, and he turned out to be a real fine classmate and ultimately our class president. he had graduated from the University of Oregon already. He also dove a fighter plane into the ground. It didn't help him, but he did right well.

Q: You often hear that if you are an Army officer's son, an Army brat, that it's sort of decided that you are going to have a career in the Army. That doesn't sound at all like your experience. it seems like you were the one who was pushing for West Point.

A: I was made to make the decision and my brother pretty much the same way. He graduated in the class of '35 at the military academy. It was our idea, I think. We weren't pushed into it, I agree. I saw boys up there who were. We've tried to learn from that. I know with our kids, one of mine wanted to go to West Point.11 We had a tough time getting him in and an even worse time keeping him in. But he has made it. He graduated near the bottom of his class, transferred to the Engineers, and later became the deputy district engineer in Louisville. He has done very well in school ever since then. The other one [Frederick], we kind of hoped that he would want to go to West Point, too. He didn't much care. He thought civilian school was much better. But he thought

he'd try, so he got an appointment and a chance to take the exam. He was shocked to discover that he not only didn't come out number one, he didn't come out! When we were at Fort Belvoir, he was in high school there in Virginia. He did so poorly his sophomore year that I said, "Freddie, what in the world can I do with you? What's going to happen?" He said, "I don't really know. I think you have got a problem. But why don't you send me to a military school?" That was his choice. I said, "Well, you pick it, and I'll try and get you in." It was then June, and it was too late to get in most of them. But he went and looked at two or three and came back and said, "I want to go to Staunton Military Academy down in the valley." And we called them and went down there, and they took pity on the fact that here I was a rather high-ranking officer and we needed to get him into something. So they took him. And we agreed that he was going to repeat his sophomore year. He didn't do too well the end of that second sophomore year, but it was an improvement. But at the end of his junior year he was selected as one of the two battalion commanders for his senior year, about the third-ranking officer, and his academic work improved, and then's when we retired. He had to decide whether to go back to Staunton and get all the perquisites, all this he had earned, or come down here to Mobile. I told him if he came down here, he had to go to this little tin school down here called UMS, University Military School. Incidentally, it's no longer a military school. He said, "Well, why do I have to do that?" I said, "Because it's the best academically. You've gone through your first nine lives on academics, let's don't walk into another trap." This was not from the military part of it, strictly the academic. so he graduated. By the time he graduated from high school he wanted to get married. We told him that was up to him, but we had a session out while I was weeding one day, and I explained that when he got married he was then a man and that was the end of my payroll as far as I was concerned. That shook him. So he said, "All right, then I'm going to enlist in the Army and get that over with and then come back and on the GI Bill. I can do it." And I said, "Well, that's your prerogative."

So one day in early September 1966, his girl, a nice little girl, had arranged for a farewell party right down here in this room--this incidentally was his suite, he had four doors he could get in and out of without us knowing it. She had a big cake baked with "Farewell Freddie" and all this stuff, and he had arranged with the recruiting people to show up the next morning. That afternoon, I was again weeding, and he came out and squatted down, didn't do much weeding, but he started talking, and he said, "I think maybe you were right." "Well," I said. "I'm glad to know that. What do you mean?" He said, "I think you were right when you told me that I would be better off graduating. I could go to college, get a reserve commission, go in 'the Army then, and be of more value than I will be if I go in right now. But now what can I do? I've got this party tonight, a farewell." I said, "Well, go have the party. Let everybody have fun, and when you get through say, 'Well, I've chickened out. I've changed my mind, I'm not going.' And just tell them that." And so he said, "Okay."

He wanted to go to Tulane, he wanted to go to Georgia Tech, he wanted to go [to] all these places. None of them would accept him, and so he continued out here at South Alabama. It [the school] had been going just about two years by that time. He said, "I'm going to finish college in three years and catch up. I'm going to get married by the time I graduate." I said, "You've set the goals/' And that's exactly what he did. Because of two years at Staunton, he got credit for one year of advanced ROTC. He had three years of advanced ROTC, so he had the full four years of that. He got his degree in three years from college. He not only did that, but he worked at McDonald's and places like that to make money in the meantime. He got married the night before graduation, went on a one-night honeymoon, came back, and graduated, and then went on a honeymoon to Fort Benning--they had two weeks to get there--and he's a regular Army officer. I say all this because again I was glad he did it, but I think I had learned from my father not to try and force him to go in.

Q: Do you have other children?

A: Two daughters.

Q: Now to get back, what year did you start at West Point?

A: July 1, 1925.

Q: When you started at West Point, were you interested in going into the Engineers?

A: Not in the slightest. No, as a matter of fact, I was somewhat immature. I went to my high school graduation dance and ate the cake and punch and stood around on the outside looking. I didn't know what you were supposed to do with girls. It bothered me when I got near them. I was really a little boy. I had a little trouble gaining enough weight to meet the requirements to get in the military academy. This National Guard boy and I, Ted Barber, had both eaten bananas before we stepped on the scale.[12] The doctor came by and took a look and said, "Can't you scrunch down a little?" So we both did, and he got a pitcher of water and said, "Here, drink that son." So I drank a whole pitcher of water and he said, "Well, I guess you make it." We were on the ragged edge of being underweight, about 140, and I was over six foot. But during plebe year I went up to about 175--the year that's supposed to be the toughest. As a matter of fact, all the uniforms they had made for me were tight by the end of plebe year. I discovered some of the other facts of life along about Christmas, plebe year, when everybody went home except the plebes. And I had a gorgeous time. Girls came up. What a lot of fun it was! But I was not what I would call mature even by that time.

As far as Engineers, no. My thought was artillery, field artillery. Now when they put you in class right at the start, they put you in alphabetically. So being a "W," I was in the last section for everything. And I found out to my horror that they graded you on that. I mean instinctively. If you were in the last section, you really had to demonstrate that you knew the subject. I found out later in the year that if you could get in the first section you were considered to be pretty smart and you had to prove you

weren't! But anyhow, after that first month in the last section I was deficient in at least one subject and some upperclassmen came to my room to buck me up. They stood me against the wall and really convinced me that it was time to go to work.

Fortunately, after a month, the sections were readjusted, and I sought my own level. After a while things were a little easier. I worked pretty hard that first year. I ran scared. As a matter of fact I ran scared enough to rank number five at the end of plebe year. But from then on, I -doubled my standing each year. If there had been a five-year course, I might not have made the Engineers. I think I was 5 the first year, 10 the second, about 20-something the third, and about 40-something the fourth. But putting; them all together I think I was 19th in class standing. I had quit running'scared by then. I talked to my father about it on one occasion, and he said, "Well, you' know, it's easy to get out of the Engineers but it's pretty hard to get in." He said, "If you earn it, why don't you try it? You **may** find you like it very much."

I decided to take his advice. So I didn't start with a goal of being an Engineer, it just seemed logical to try it since I had earned it. And I've never regretted it since. I had some classmates who spent a lot of time coaching other cadets. I coached some each year at turnout exams. I had to keep studying, but I didn't take it quite as seriously as I had earlier.

Q: What were your impressions of West Point in the mid--twenties?

A: Well, I'm probably pretty naive, but I thought it was fine. Looking at it afterwards, there really weren't any worse times. Most of what we talk about at reunions and have fun kidding about and thinking back on were what seemed terrible at the time they happened. When you think about them afterwards, there were reasons for them, or they really weren't too tough. I didn't try very hard for cadet military rank and as a matter of fact I felt a great deal of pride in being an area bird, one of those guys that had to walk punishment tours on the area. Twice I was busted from a cadet rank,

and this didn't bother me in the slightest. Fortunately, my other two roommates and I, who lived together most of the four years, are all alive. It's the oddball things that we think about when we get together for reunions.

I didn't always live up to the rules. I mean by that I got caught on some. As an example, I told you my uniforms were getting too tight. In those days you didn't have a leave until you had **been** there a year--and-a-half, and then at the end of two years you had a two-and-a-half months' furlough. When I came back from that two-and-a-half months' furlough, nothing fit, and I was too tight to go and buy a whole new bunch of uniforms. So I kept having the cadet store put a larger collar on a blouse, or something like that, and I got by pretty well. But the first time we put on overcoats that fall was to go to chapel, and when I put on my FD [full dress] coat with brass buttons on the collar and then tried to hook the collar in my overcoat, it was no longer possible. And I thought, oh boy. I was a corporal at the time, and I went to the formation with my overcoat collar unhooked. Nobody noticed it. I rushed up to the cadet store the next Monday and said, "Need a new collar on my overcoat right away." And they said, "We can't. We're taking care of all the plebes. They don't have all their overcoats and everything yet. So you must wait."

Well, I figured out that for formations I could just go with nothing under my overcoat, and it would be just fine. Nobody would ever notice it. But then they announced that we were going to wear full-dress coats to the Notre Dame football game in New York. It had never happened while I was there. And that was too much, putting those brass buttons and all on. I couldn't get my coat collar closed, and this would show up for sure in Yankee Stadium. so I thought about it awhile, and I finally went to a classmate who was the next year's football captain and asked would he carry my full-dress coat down to his room at the Astor. He said, "Sure." So I sent off my full-dress coat with the team on Friday morning and figured I'd just wear my overcoat until after the game and go to the Astor and get my blouse. It was a fine idea except others had thought similar thoughts, and so

there came an announcement at noon that cadets will wear full-dress coats. My FD coat was already en route to the Astor.

Saturday morning, when we fell into ranks, the company commander said, "All right, there will be a l0-minute break now. Anyone who doesn't have his full-dress coat on, fall out and go get it **and put it on."** I stood there. There wasn't anything else to do. Mine was in New York City. So I mounted the train and sat in that heavy thing, sweat pouring off of me. I went in the little boys' **room** once or twice, took things off and panted, but nobody ever saw me out of uniform. I went through the game and went down to the Astor and put on **my** FD coat. I was never seen improperly dressed, except as to overcoat collar hooked, but Monday morning there was the skin sheet on the bulletin board for failing to wear an FD coat, and I was in trouble. So I reported to the battalion board, consisting of three senior officers--Bradley was one of them--to explain.13 I gave them my little explanation, and they said, "Well, that didn't sound very smart." "No, sir," I said, "it doesn't now either to me." But, I said, "Here I am. I couldn't get my coat fixed. The cadet store couldn't handle it." They said, "Did you go talk to your tactical officer?" I said, "To my tactical officer?" They said, "Yes, he'd have helped you." "Well, I never thought of anything like that, I'd never expect a tactical officer to help me. All I would expect him to do was skin me.' That finished it.

For the rest of the month of November and December I kept waiting for the axe to fall. Finally I wrote **home and said,** "I won't be home for Christmas. Don't kill the fatted calf." But about three days before Christmas leave, they read them out in the mess hall and had busted me and given me 21 hours but no confinement, so I was able to go on Christmas leave anyhow. But I had to come back and walk 21 hours in the snow and the cold, every Saturday and Wednesday: 3 **on** Saturday and **2** on Wednesday.

No, I wasn't too impressed. I got to be a first sergeant, but I believe that was solely because the company tactical officer had the right to name his

own **first** sergeant, because I don't believe I earned it. But I learned an awful lot by being the company first sergeant. I learned how to get people. moving. and keep them edging in the right direction and **avoiding** any direct confrontations, just kind of ease them around and keep them on their toes. It was good experience, no doubt about it.

As far as I'm concerned, I like West Point. I knew what1 was getting into. I never was asked to do anything that was beyond what I could expect to do Oh it was regimented and some people say you didn't have enough freedom of choice and all of this. That didn't bother me. I didn't know enough to get bothered.

Q: You've mentioned classmates but not by name. Were **there any** of **your** classmates who went on to greater distinction like yourself?

A: Oh, a whole lot of **them,** many of them.

Q: Well, who were your closest associates?

A: My closest associates were the ones **in the** same company. Ed Lasher was one.[14] He went into QM [Quartermaster] construction and then the Transportation Corps and retired as a major general and went to Chicago and took on the job of president of a big company. He made a jillion dollars and made his company very successful. Another roommate, [James J. Winn], was a colonel, a real good one.[15] He married General Marshall's stepdaughter. He never got any advantage out of that. He's just the opposite. He's well off, he's doing well, and is very well respected. We've got quite a few that were three- and four-star generals. Frank Merrill of Merrill's Marauders was a classmate of mine.[16] Actually he was a roommate with me out in New Delhi at the time he got appointed to that position. The man who really earned it was another classmate named Ruby Hunter, who got very little credit, but he did the organization and training of that outfit and then got more or less submerged.[17] There's Freddie Smith in the Air Force.[18] Oh, there's a lot of them. Jimmy- Gavin, Paul Harkins, Bozo McKee, Bob Ward, Al Viney, Jack Person, Paul Freeman -too many to list.[19]

West Point Roommates. Walter K. Wilson, Jr., reunited in 1958 with West Point roommates Colonel James J. Winn, III (c.) and Major General Edmund C.R. Lasher

Any number of three and four-star generals were classmates. I'd have to get out a list and look. The system can't have been so wrong and produce as many of them as it did that did well, in my opinion.

Q: What about professors at the military academy who particularly influenced you?

A: Oh, I was going to say, we had one classmate, Abe Lincoln, "Big Abe" we called him, although he was "little Abe."[20] "Big Abe" was the older of the Lincoln brothers and he was' a professor at the military academy. He was a general during World War II. I was a general briefly also during World War II. Abe went up to the military academy as a professor. He got to be a confidant of presidents and [to] the State Department and other things.

My father had a classmate up there named. Mitchell, who was professor of engineering.[21] I went back up there as an instructor later and worked for him. There were some fine men as professors in those days. Bradley was in the tactical department--battalion tactical officer if I remember correctly--and he was on the "bat board." Yes, the three battalion senior tactical officers formed the bat board. They reviewed the disciplinary actions and recommended to the commandant. But there were some fine people there. They influenced us, there's no. question about it. One thing that old Professor Mitchell used to say that impressed me, not only as a cadet, but later when I became an instructor, was "Do something! Don't just sit there floundering. Analyze it, decide what you can do and do it. Zoom!" And he actually told us when we were grading engineering papers that if you get one from a cadet that says, "I don't know how to do this problem, but here's something I do know how to do," give him pretty close to a passing grade anyway, if not passing. It depends on how difficult a problem he's chosen to put down. To me a poor decision well carried out is better than a brilliant decision poorly carried out, and that's in essence what he was saying. And I think that's been true the rest of my life. I've noticed that it's how much drive and attention and staying power you put out that really produces the accomplishment in the long run. I don't mean you shouldn't have some

brilliant people planning on it, but it's the execution as well as the thought behind it that makes it work.

Q: How did you find the curriculum at West Point?

A: Everything was a challenge to me. I don't think we in those days were nearly as analytical as the student of today. I mean, as far as I was concerned, whatever they threw at us was something I had to do. There weren't any ifs, ands, or buts about it. I didn't spend hours looking further. into subjects very often. There wasn't near the emphasis on library research and all that kind of business that later times brought along. But I think we had people come out of it that have done a right good job of what they were intended to do.

Q: If you would like, could you comment on recent problems at West Point?

A: I don't think there is any particular thing I can add to the honor system problem or silencing. I'll put it this way. I went through an episode of silencing as a brand new yearling, a sophomore in other words, just after the plebe year. There were some people in the class ahead accused of honor violations who were kept back from furlough and did duty with us. And I went through a horrible period of time when we were pulling targets for another company. This joker and I were on the same target. Here we were, and I wasn't supposed to talk to him. I couldn't help but sympathize with the poor devil. His grandfather and great-grandfather had been heroes back in the Civil War and earlier days. Whatever he was accused of, I didn't know. But it seemed to me they were putting him through hell, and it also made it hard on us because we were trying to live by the code, and you just didn't say anything to him. So here you are pulling targets, and you could point to the place, but you didn't talk. That's a minor thing now.

I was impressed with the honor code as we knew it. I had classmates turn themselves in, not for real crucial things, but where they had inadvertently given an "all right," which is the same as saying, "I'm doing something proper, and it's authorized."

And after thinking about it awhile, they decided they really had to turn themselves in, and they walked for two or three months as a result. They didn't use it for discipline in those days. It was more for honor.

Now, I think as they got bigger and bigger and bigger, the honor system and the disciplinary system got married to a degree. When I was there as an instructor or when I was there as a cadet, they would never have put us in a position where it was easy to find out from another battalion what was going on before you did it. The time interval was such that you would have to really go out of your way and obviously be trying to cheat in order to do it. I coached my two roommates when they were yearlings, one of them in analytical geometry and the other one in descriptive geometry. One of them could do one and couldn't do the other, and vice versa. I could get by in both subjects. So every night I worked like the devil on one, and the other the next night. I didn't know what was going to be asked because I was taking the work at the same time they were. I was able to outguess it on occasion. But they never set it up in such a manner that what you turned in today was what somebody else was going to do tomorrow or something like that. To some extent, I think it was the fault of the administration to let it reach that point.

I'll put it another way. they never played cat and mouse. They never set up a situation that I can remember that would tend to lead to want to do a little cheating.

As first classmen, two other classmates and I decided we were going to live high, wide, and handsome. So from Pinky, the enlisted-man mail carrier, we bought a secondhand car, a little Studebaker. That was outside the rules. If anyone in authority had asked us if we had a car, we'd have said yes and that would have been it. But we carefully kept it down in Highland Falls, and when we went on weekend leave we'd get in a taxi, ride to Highland Falls, get our car, and take off. Once you were off the post you were entitled to drive. This was fine except one of the three of us was getting enough demerits each month so that he never earned any leave. So he never got to use that car.

At Christmas two of us went off in the car and visited a classmate in Philadelphia and then went to Washington, where we stayed with my mother and father. We had a gay old time, and Washington was a great town for cadets in those days. They had tea dances and debutante parties, and it didn't cost you anything except to wear a uniform. Cadets didn't have money in those days to amount to anything. The poor third guy showed up in Washington for his turn about three days before Christmas leave was over. Well, by that time we were well fixed up with dates, so he ended up sitting in the rumble seat. He finally behaved the month of April so that he got leave in May, and we both said, "It's your turn. You have the car. We're not going to interfere." And I looked out the window of the barracks, and there was this cluck striding across the area of barracks and climbing into the car, right there. He took off.

The guard at the south gate tried to stop him, and he just waved at him and kept on going. He went off and had a fine weekend. He came back, and Sunday night he showed up in my room and handed me a dollar and said, "You're selling me your part of the car. Here's a dollar." I said, "I'm not selling it to you for a dollar." He said, "You're selling me your part of the car for a dollar, you better take it." I said, "Okay." So the next morning when they called him up and said, "Who owns that car?" he said, "I do." They didn't ever ask any more than that.....So..he...was..in confinement and walking tours right up until the morning of graduation. They took the car away and hauled it out to the post garage till graduation* I bought back their shares of the car and that was my first automobile after being commissioned.

To answer your question, really I think it's too bad if they don't have a good honor system. It's too bad if they run it in[to] the ground and make it a disciplinary tool. The less the system involves, the better it is. We had honor representatives in the company, but I don't remember wanting to ask them something because it was relatively simple. You knew it was either yes or no, so you didn't have any problem.

Q: Can you tell me a little about your graduate work at Berkeley? What you specialized in?